



Indiana Courts: How do they work?

A curriculum unit for secondary school teachers

This lesson plan is constructed to work with any resources a classroom teacher regularly uses in the course of teaching an American History, Government, or Indiana History class. In addition to the materials that a teacher might have at hand, some online suggestions are provided. A few general legal links are included at the bottom of the lesson to aid a teacher or student interested in further exploration of this or any other legal topic. A [glossary](#) of legal terms used in this and other Courts in the Classroom lesson plans is available on-line as well.

Learning Objectives:

At the end of this lesson a student will be able to:

1. Identify the various branches of Indiana's judicial system
2. Understand and discuss the difference between trial and appellate courts
3. Understand and discuss the difference between a civil and a criminal case
4. Determine what is the appropriate place within the judicial system for a given case to be heard

Online Resources:

[Indiana Constitution Article 7](#)

[Indiana Code Title 33](#)

[Indiana's Judicial System](#)

[Is it a Civil or Criminal Case? How to tell the difference](#)

[Chart of the Indiana Court System](#)

Learning Activities:

1. Divide the students into groups and ask them to create a flow chart showing how a civil and/or a criminal case works its way through the legal system. Provide different scenarios to each group.

Suggested topics: a case resulting in the death penalty, a custody case, a case concerning the taxes on lottery winnings, a case about the probate of a will, a charge of slander, a suit concerning property damage resulting in a claim for less than \$500

2. Using newspapers and magazines appropriate for your class (example: *Newsweek*, *Time for Kids*, *Scholastic Weekly*, a local newspaper), have students look for stories that

involve the Judicial branch. Ask your students to decide which court would most likely deal with the particular topics they discovered.

3. A variation of activity number 2: Choose a case that has already worked its way through the judicial system. Have the students explore its path.
4. Ask students to brainstorm a list of rules and regulations that they are familiar with in their school or community. Choose one topic and conduct a mock trial. One set of students will prepare an argument to challenge the law and one side to defend it. If the losing side is unhappy with the judge's decisions you might continue the activity by proceeding with the appellate process.

Topics might include: curfews, dress code, speed limits, recycling

5. Using a copy of the federal Constitution (see link provided below), have students look for similarities and differences between the constitutional provisions for the judicial branch in that document and in the Indiana Constitution. Compare the structure of Indiana's judicial branch to that of other states in the United States (see link provided below).

For Further Study:

The [State of Indiana's official website](#) is a rich resource for the current activities of the executive branch, the legislature and the judiciary. It also provides links to up-to-date online texts of the [Indiana Code](#) and [Constitution](#).

The [Library of Congress](#) offers a vast number of resources online. These include historical documents such as the [Constitution and the Bill of Rights](#) as well as links to current [legislation and Congressional activities](#).

The Legal Information Institute of the Cornell law school offers an [on-line encyclopedia for legal research](#).

The Cornell law school's [Legal Information Institute webpages](#) also provide links to decisions handed down from the [U.S. Supreme Court and the federal courts](#) as well as [opinions from state courts around the country](#). Links to each state's constitution and other related judicial issues can also be accessed from this site.

Related Indiana Social Studies Standards

U.S. Government.3.6: Explain the functions of the courts of law in governments of the United States and the state of Indiana with emphasis on the principles of judicial review and an independent judiciary.

U.S. Government.1.13: Examine fundamental documents in the American political tradition..., the United States Constitution,...the Indiana Constitutions of 1816 and 1851 to identify key ideas regarding the nature of limited government and the protection of individual rights.

U.S. Government.5.13: Practice civic skills and dispositions by participating in a group of activities such as simulated public hearings, mock trials, and debates.